

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An answering machine detection method for a voice message delivery system comprising the steps of:

- (a) placing an outbound call to a Recipient;
- (b) detecting a telephone line pick-up;
- (c) detecting whether the telephone line pick-up was by an existing answering machine or a live Recipient.

2. The answering machine detection method of Claim 1, wherein step (c) comprises:

- (c1) playing a prompt;
- (c2) listening for talk-over during the playing of the prompt;
- (c3) determining the telephone line pick-up was by an existing answering machine if there is talk-over during the playing of the prompt.

3. The answering machine detection method of Claim 2, and further comprising the steps of:

- (d) waiting for silence if the telephone line pick-up was by an existing answering machine;

(e) playing a message if the telephone line pick-up was by an existing answering machine;

(f) playing a message if the telephone line pick-up was by a live Recipient.

4. The answering machine detection method of Claim 3, and further comprising the steps of:

(g) detecting talk-over during playing of the message if the telephone line pick-up was by an existing answering machine;

(h) restarting the playing of the message if the telephone line pick-up was by an existing answering machine and talk-over is detected during playing of the message.

5. The answering machine detection method of Claim 3, wherein step (e) comprises:

(e) playing a first message if the telephone line pick-up was by an existing answering machine;

and further wherein step (f) comprises:

(f) playing a second message different from the first message if the telephone line pick-up was by a live Recipient.

6. The answering machine detection method of Claim 3, wherein step (f) comprises:

(f) playing a message and playing at least one interactive option if the telephone line pick-up was by a live Recipient.

7. The answering machine detection method of Claim 3, wherein step (f) comprises:

(f) playing at least one interactive reject option, playing a message and playing at least one interactive option if the telephone line pick-up was by a live Recipient.

8. The answering machine detection method of Claim 1, wherein step (c) comprises:

(c1) playing a prompt that requests a touch-tone input;

(c2) listening for the requested touch-tone input;

(c3) determining the telephone line pick-up was by an existing answering machine if the requested touch-tone input is heard.

9. The answering machine detection method of Claim 1, wherein step (c) comprises:

(c1) playing a prompt that requests a specific speech input;

(c2) listening for the requested specific speech input;

(c3) determining the telephone line pick-up was by an existing answering machine if the requested specific speech input is heard.

10. The answering machine detection method of Claim 2, wherein step (c1) comprises:

(c1) playing a prompt within one second of detecting a telephone line pick-up.

11. The answering machine detection method of Claim 2, wherein step (c1) comprises:

(c1a) detecting voice energy after detecting a telephone line pick-up;

(c1b) playing a prompt within one second of detecting voice energy.

12. The answering machine detection method of Claim 2, wherein step (c1) comprises:

(c1a) detecting voice energy and the end of voice energy after detecting a telephone line pick-up;

(c1b) playing a prompt within one second of detecting the end of the voice energy.

13. The answering machine detection method of Claim 2, wherein step (c1) comprises:

(c1) playing a prompt that introduces a call to a live Recipient.

14. The answering machine detection method of Claim 2, wherein step (c1) comprises:

(c1) playing a prompt that introduces a call to a live Recipient by playing a prompt selected from the group consisting of: "This is a message from [Sender's name]"; "This is a call from [Sender's name]; and "[Sender's name] has sent you a message."

15. An apparatus for detecting an answering machine for a voice message delivery system including a TeleMail Server connectable to a telephone communications system, wherein the TeleMail Server operates to:

- (a) place an outbound call to a Recipient;
- (b) detect a telephone line pick-up;
- (c) detect whether the telephone line pick-up was by an existing answering machine or a live Recipient.

16. The apparatus for detecting an answering machine for a voice message delivery system of Claim 15, wherein a TeleMail Server in step (c) operates to:

- (c1) play a prompt;
- (c2) listen for talk-over during the playing of the prompt;
- (c3) determine the telephone line pick-up was by an existing answering machine if there is talk-over during the playing of the prompt.

17. The apparatus for detecting an answering machine for a voice message delivery system of Claim 16, wherein the TeleMail Server additionally operates to:

- (d) wait for silence if the telephone line pick-up was by an existing answering machine;
- (e) play a message if the telephone line pick-up was by an existing answering machine;
- (f) play a message if the telephone line pick-up was by a live Recipient.

18. The apparatus for detecting an answering machine for a voice message delivery system of Claim 17, wherein the TeleMail Server additionally operates to:

- (g) detect talk-over during playing of the message if the telephone line pick-up was by an existing answering machine;
- (h) restart the playing of the message if the telephone line pick-up was by an existing answering machine and talk-over is detected during playing of the message.

19. The apparatus for detecting an answering machine for a voice message delivery system of Claim 17, wherein the TeleMail Server in step (e) operates to:

- (e) play a first message if the telephone line pick-up was by an existing answering machine;

and further wherein the TeleMail Server in step (f) operates to:

(f) play a second message different from the first message if the telephone line pick-up was by a live Recipient.

20. The apparatus for detecting an answering machine for a voice message delivery system of Claim 17, wherein the TeleMail Server in step (f) operates to:

(f) play a message and play at least one interactive option if the telephone line pick-up was by a live Recipient.